
Higher Education Teaching-Learning in Bhutan: Innovation, Adaptations, Opportunities, and Challenges



National Conference: July 4th-5th, 2022

Co-Hosted by:

- Centre for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL), Royal Thimphu College (RTC)
- Centre for Innovation in Educational Practice and Research (CIEPR), Samtse College of Education (SCE)
- Centre for Educational Research and Development, Paro College of Education (PCE)



In partnership with:

Department of Adult and Higher Education, Ministry of Education



Background

Bhutan's journey of modern mass education started in 1955, and by 1959, Bhutan had 11 primary schools with about 440 students studying (His Majesty, Royal Kasho on Education Reform, 2020).

Tertiary education in Bhutan began in 1983 with the up-gradation of Sherubtse Junior College to an undergraduate degree college. The Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) was established on 2nd June 2003 by Royal Charter. At present, there are 11 RUB colleges, of which 9 are constituent public colleges and 2 are affiliated private colleges. There are two higher education institutions (HEIs) besides RUB, the Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Science and Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law. According to the 2020 Annual Education Statistics report, the tertiary enrolment rate in Bhutan is 4.4%; the female enrolment rate is slightly lower at 48.6% compared to the male enrolment rate.

The Royal Kasho announced on 17th December 2020 that education reform in Bhutan calls for a relook into the current education practices to make education current, relevant and adaptive to the fast-changing digital world. It also calls for the education fraternity in Bhutan to revisit our current teaching-learning practices to align with 21st-century challenges and opportunities.

The need for dialogue and discussion in higher education teaching-learning practices is felt now more than ever. Beyond the continuous challenge of ensuring meaningful graduate outcomes, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education at all levels and stimulated rethinks about numerous core assumptions in educational practice – what is essential, what is not, what works well, what does not, challenges and opportunities for student learning independence, and the role of technology – among others.

Some of the most urgent questions for higher education in Bhutan are: How can we teach, support, and groom graduates who lead purposeful lives and who are well-rounded citizens of the country? How do we develop our graduates into 21st-century skilled individuals that can compete in the domestic and international labour market? How do we leverage their digital nativity for productive learning? How do we teach higher education students to be lifelong learners?

Conference Presenters and Speakers:

- 5 keynote speakers
- 19 presenters
- Panel discussion on '*21st century Bhutanese graduates*'

Conference Objectives:

- Consolidate actual on-the-ground experiences and data on higher education teaching-learning in Bhutan;
- Provide a platform to share innovations, adaptations, and challenges in higher education in recent years;
- Create space for academics to engage in creative thinking on teaching and learning in higher education as a continuous curriculum enhancement and innovation process;
- Discuss ways forward for the adoption of innovative and adaptive practices.

Conference Themes:

- Student learning experiences, motivation, and student-centred learning environments
- Teaching experiences, challenges, innovative practices - teaching, learning and assessment
- Higher education management and quality assurance
- Inclusiveness in higher education – learning difficulties and disabilities
- Technology and higher education

Conference Organizing Team:

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Thinley Yuden

Intern, CITL

Royal Thimphu College

Agenda for Day 1

07:30-08:00	Registration of the participants and arrival of Chief guest
08:00-08:10	Welcome speech by MC
08:10-08:20	Welcome by Mr. Tshewang Tandin, President, Royal Thimphu College
08:20-08:50	Address by the Chief Guest, Hon'ble Sherig Lyonpo
08:50-09:20	Keynote by Dr. Dorji Thinley, President, Paro College of Education
09:20-09:30	Photo session
09:30-10:00	Inaugural Tea
10:00-12:00	Session on the theme: Student Learning Experience
10:00-10:15	Session introduction by the Chair, Dr. Deki Gyamtso, Associate Professor, PCE
10:15-10:35	Keynote by Dr. Maureen Bell, Honorary Senior Fellow, University of Wollongong, Australia: <i>"Thoughts on teaching & learning in higher education"</i>
10:35-10:55	The undergraduate research experience in Bhutan: A case study of social science and humanities undergraduate research at RTC - <i>Dolma Roder and Team, RTC</i>
10:55-11:15	Attitude towards plagiarism among Sherubtseans - <i>Tashi Chopel, Sherubtse</i>
11:15-11:35	Peer observation as a professional development tool for higher education in Bhutan: A case study at RTC - <i>Tshering Lhamo Dukpa, CITL, RTC</i>
11:35-11:55	Common discussion session for the theme led by the Chair
12:00-13:00	<i>Lunch Break</i>
13:00-16:00	Session on the theme: Teacher Experience
13:00-13:05	Session introduction by the Chair, Dr. Dolma Roder, Associate Professor, RTC
13:05-13:25	Keynote by Professor Nick Hopwood, Associate Professor, University of Technology, Australia: <i>"Provocations and possibilities: Higher education for transformative agency?"</i>
13:25-13:45	Bhutanese Pre-service Science Teachers' Perception of Nature of Science: A View from Cross-sectional Study - <i>Sherab Jatsho, DAHE and Karma Dorji, REC</i>
13:45-14:05	Exploring tutors' pedagogical content knowledge in higher education to understand challenges, needs, and opportunities in teaching-learning: A case study of RTC - <i>Kencho Pelzom & Kuenga Norbu, CITL, RTC</i>
14:05-14:25	Faculty Experience in Research in the Higher Education Institute: College of Language and Culture Studies (CLCS) - <i>Sangay Phuntsho, CLCS</i>
14:25-15:00	<i>Tea break</i>
15:00-15:20	Qualitative Research Training in a Bhutanese Context: Opportunities and Challenges - <i>Brent Thomas Bianchi, HAPPY Project, RTC</i>
15:20-15:40	Perceptions of academics of the Royal University of Bhutan on the potential infusion of Educating for Gross National Happiness with Biggs' Constructive Alignment - <i>Deki Gyamtso, PCE</i>
15:40-16:00	Common discussion session for the theme led by the Chair

Agenda for Day 2

- 09:00-11:10 **Session on the theme: Higher Education Management & Quality Assurance**
- 09:00-09:05 Session Introduction by the Chair, Dr. Sonam Rinchen, Assistant Professor, SCE
- 09:05-09:25 Keynote by Professor Karanam Pushpanadham, Head of Department of Educational Administration, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India
- 09:25-09:45 Continuous Quality Enhancement of Higher Education in Bhutan: A Post Accreditation Measure - *Nima Lham and Team, DAHE*
- 09:45-10:05 Performance of Higher Education Institutions in Bhutan: An exploratory study of the Institutional Self-Assessment Report (ISAR) and Accreditors' - *Sangay Choden, DAHE and Team*
- 10:05-10:30 Tea break
- 10:30-10:50 Rethinking higher education landscape in Bhutan post COVID-19 - *Kinley Rinchen, OVC, RUB*
- 10:50-11:10 Common discussion session for the theme led by the Chair
- 11:10-12:15 **Session on the theme: Inclusiveness in Higher Education - Learning difficulties and disabilities**
- 11:10-11:15 Session Introduction
- 11:15-11:35 Preparedness of Bhutanese Higher Education Institutions for Inclusive Education: An Exploratory Study - *Ganeshman Gurung, SCE and Team*
- 11:35-11:55 RTC - ESRC-GCRF Project: Understanding, Developing, and Supporting Meaningful Work for Youth with Disabilities in Bhutan - *Ura Sonam, RTC*
- 11:55-12:15 Session Q&A
- 12:15-13:15 Lunch break
- 13:15-15:15 **Session on the theme: Technology and Higher Education**
- 13:15-13:20 Session introduction by the chair Dr. Samir Patel, RTC
- 13:20-13:50 Keynote by Dr. Audrey Low, President, Gyalpozhing College of Information Technology, RUB: '*Convergence of AI and Blockchain Technology*'
- 13:50-14:10 Competencies of RUB academics in using virtual learning environment features for students' engagement in online learning - *Ugyen Pem, SCE and Team*
- 14:10-14:30 Degree of Learner Autonomy Among University Students - *Chimi Dema & Kezang Yuden, GCIT*
- 14:30-14:50 Opportunities and Challenges of Online Teaching: A Convergent Mixed-Method Study on the Implementation of Online Teaching in the Colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan - *Kinley Selden, SCE and Team*
- 14:50-15:10 Exploring university students' acceptance of e-learning using E-learning Acceptance Measure (ELAM) in Bhutan: A validation study - *Sonam Dendup, MoE*
- 15:10-15:30 Common discussion session for the theme led by the Chair
- 15:30-16:00 Tea break
- 16:00-17:30 **Panel discussion on '21st Century Bhutanese Graduates'** (Moderator Dr. Kezang Sherub, DURL, PCE)
Tashi Namgyal (Director, DAHE), Aum Tashi Pem (Director General, RCSC), Dasho Nidup Dorji (Vice Chancellor, RUB), Chenchu Lhamu (Executive Director, BCMD), and Sonam Pelden Thaye (Director, RIM)
- 16:50-17:30 Question & Answer session
- 17:30-17:40 Vote of Thanks by Dr. Sonam Rinchen, DRIL, Samtse College of Education
- 18:30 Dinner

Conference Scientific Committee



DR. KEZANG SHERAB

Dean of Research & Industrial linkages/Assistant professor

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Dr. Kezang Sherab is the Dean of Research and Industrial Linkages/Assistant Professor at the Paro College of Education, RUB. He has a PhD (*Cum Laude*) in Education from the University of New England in Australia and an MEd in Curriculum and Instruction from St. Francis Xavier University in Canada. He teaches Health and Physical Education and Research Methodology courses both at the undergraduate and graduate levels and provides professional development programmes for school teachers, university academics, and also for youth voluntary groups. Kezang has published on a variety of educational topics, reviewed journal manuscripts, examined PhD theses, and has led several consultancies for the Ministry of Education (MoE), UNICEF, National Council, UNFPA, and the Royal Education Council. His research interests are in educational change, student engagement, efficacy beliefs, GNH Education, non-cognitive skills, and issues concerning the youth. He served as the Dean of Research and Industrial Linkages at the Centre for Educational Research and Development from 2009-to 2010 and 2014-to 2017. Kezang was also successful in bidding and convening International (International Society for Teacher Education Seminars – 32nd in 2012 & 41st to be held in 2023), and 7th International Association of Art in Early Childhood Conference (in 2017) and national seminars (Education through sports and physical education 2005).

DR. DEKI C GYAMTSO

Associate Professor

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Dr. Deki C Gyamtso, PhD, is a teacher educator. She started her career as a lecturer in Geography at Samtse College of Education and has since then had the privilege to hold key positions such as BEd Secondary and Primary Programme Leader; Distance Teacher Education Programme (DTEP) Coordinator; Coordinator of the Centre for University Learning and Teaching (CULT); Assistant Principal (Academic Affairs) and the Dean of Academic Affairs in the College. During her tenure, she contributed immensely to the overall academic development of Samtse College of Education. In 2014 to broaden her horizons, she went on secondment for a period of two years to The Royal Academy, Paro. From 2016 – to 2019 she worked in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor, RUB in various capacities as Managing Editor of the Bhutan Journal of Research and Development (BJRD), Higher Education Specialist, Researcher, Facilitator, and short-course designer. In 2020 she returned to her initial passion for teaching at Paro College of Education. In her teaching and leadership roles, she came across great opportunities, and achieved considerable responsibilities. She wrote and evaluated several courses, taught undergraduate and postgraduate students, and trained school teachers and university academics.

DR. DOLMA CHODEN RODER

Programme Leader of BA Anthropology / Associate Professor

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Dolma Choden Roder earned an MA and PhD in Socio-cultural Anthropology from Arizona State University, USA. She also has a BA (Honours) in Anthropology from the University of Melbourne, Australia. Her current research and teaching interests are in gender, education, family, material culture, and youth cultures.



DR. SONAM RINCEN

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Dr. Sonam Rinchen, PhD is a teacher educator at Samtse College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan. He has taught chemistry, chemistry education, research methods, and other educational modules to the pre-service and in-service teachers. He is a passionate teacher and a keen researcher. His research interests include teacher education and women's studies. He is also interested in the study of emotions and the emotional climate of science classrooms both at the school and university levels.

Conference Keynote Speaker

Dr. Dorji Thinley

President

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Dr. Dorji Thinley is the President of Paro College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan. He has a PhD in Education cum laude from the University of New England, Australia, and an advanced Diploma in Counseling & Special Education (Canada, 2000). He served as the Director of Research and External Relations at the Office of the Vice-Chancellor, the Royal University of Bhutan from July 2011 till July 2015. Dr. Dorji Thinley has been extensively engaged in developing education policies and systems throughout his career mainly in tertiary education. He has published prolifically on educational topics, and has also been a reviewer and lead editor for national and international publications, supervised PhD students abroad, developed education curriculums, and has led a number of international projects.

THEME 1: Student Learning Experiences

Keynote: *Thoughts on teaching & learning in higher education*

Dr Maureen Bell, FHERDSA

Editor HERDSA CONNECT

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Maureen Bell is Editor of HERDSA CONNECT, BA (Hons Psych), Dip Ed, M Ed (Adult Ed), Ph.D. an Honorary Senior Fellow at the University of Wollongong, and an educational development consultant. She has published book chapters and journal articles on study abroad, internationalization of the curriculum, and peer review of teaching. She coordinated the UOW foundations of higher education courses Introduction to Tertiary Teaching (EDGA997) and developed and coordinated the University Learning and Teaching course from 1996-to 2008. In the transnational arena, she developed and taught the foundations of university teaching courses for the University of Wollongong Dubai and has provided a range of professional development workshops in New Zealand, China, and Bhutan. In 2007 Maureen received a citation from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council for her contribution to teaching in higher education. The second edition of her HERDSA Guide: Peer Observation of Teaching in Higher Education was published in 2012. Maureen is a Life Member and Fellow of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.

Theme 1 Papers:

The undergraduate research experience in Bhutan: A case study of social science and humanities undergraduate research at RTC - Kencho Pelzom, Vanlallawmkimi, Mohan Rai and Dr. Dolma C. Roder

Presenter: Dr. Dolma Choden Roder

Programme Leader of BA Anthropology / Associate Professor

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Dolma Choden Roder earned an MA and Ph.D. in Socio-cultural Anthropology from Arizona State University, USA. She also has a BA (honours) in Anthropology from the University of Melbourne, Australia. Her current research and teaching interests are in gender, education, family, material culture, and youth cultures.

Abstract: This research investigated the undergraduate research experiences of social science and humanities students at Royal Thimphu College. For the purpose of the study the focus was five programmes in social science and humanities. Qualitative research approaches were used

to collect the data for the current study; namely repeated reflective in-depth interviews with current students in the five programmes, focus group discussions with students and interviews with faculty who supervised the final year research was also done, along with in-depth interviews with alumni. The preliminary findings from the study indicate that final year research helps students become more independent learners. By the end of the year students felt a sense of ownership, confidence, and agency. Although most students felt their prior learning somewhat prepared them to undertake the project, many also found that applying what they learned about research was challenging. Time and workload were found to be common challenges for both faculty and students. Finally, it was found that the relationship between students and their supervisors as well as feelings of ownership varied based on faculty personality as well as the informal programme culture.

Attitude towards plagiarism among Sherubtseans - Tashi Chophel

Presenter: Tashi Chophel

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Tashi Chophel has been associated with Sherubtse college since 2010. He joined Sherubtse college in the year 2010 as an Assistant lecturer in Political Science and Sociology programme. He is currently serving as the programme leader for BA in Political Science and Sociology programme. He has a Master's Degree from the University of Deusto, Spain. Apart from teaching, he also engages in research activities. He attended many seminars as a research presenter and has various publications of his own.

Abstract: Academic writing is specifically an arduous task for students as it is associated with an assortment of cognitive and linguistic processes which is beyond the student's capability. As a consequence, in order to fulfill the writing requirement of academia, students often resort to make use of other people's words and ideas without citing the source, a practice which is commonly referred to as plagiarism. One of the fundamental reasons for the occurrence of plagiarism among students' which scholars have identified is associated with the plethora of electronic resources and widely available material through the internet, taking the help of internet to fulfill academic needs is one of the main reasons of students resorting to plagiarism. Hence, it is evident that teaching basic academic skills, writing, and source acknowledgement to the students can inevitably be discouraging for the academics as a consequence of student's constant abuse of source utilization from the internet by the students. The occurrence of plagiarism generally in colleges in Bhutan is a matter to be contended with, given that students tend to take a lenient approach towards academic writing. The participants will be selected using simple random sampling method. The data will be collected through participant observation and by interviewing them. Therefore, this paper will explore multi-dimensional approach in understanding the reasons of plagiarism as opposed to taking uni-dimensional approach in Sherubtse college.

Peer observation as a professional development tool for higher education in Bhutan: A case study at RTC - Tshering Lhamo Dukpa

Presenter: Tshering Lhamo Dukpa

Senior Lecturer

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Tshering Lhamo Dukpa is a senior lecturer with 8+ years of experience in teaching various economics modules to the undergraduate students at the Royal Thimphu College. She holds BA (Honours) in economics from ST. Edmund's College in Shillong, India, and a masters in economics from Madras Christian College in Chennai, India. She holds a PGCHE from Samtse College of Education.

Abstract: Peer observation and peer feedback are tools used by educators in their professional development. Using a case study of a private college, this study examines the effectiveness of peer observation and feedback in enhancing student-centred teaching-learning practices in Bhutan. Today more than ever before, it's important for educators to know what works to maintain the students' interest in the class and more importantly what works the best for a specific group of pupils in a classroom environment. This requires constantly challenging one's own assumptions about teaching and learning, educating oneself on more tried and tested pedagogical theories, and critical reflection on classroom practices. Peer observation and constant peer feedback are a few tools to achieve these. In this study, six tutors at Royal Thimphu College were interviewed about their experience of participating in a peer observation exercise. This study found that unlike the potentially evaluative nature of feedback from the program leaders and the management, peer observation is more effective and welcomed by the teachers because of its non-evaluative nature. The observed and the observers equally benefited from learning and adapting new teaching strategies acquired as a result of the peer observation. Receiving feedback and attending the classes of the peers were perceived to be beneficial by all the participants. The paper concludes by identifying some of the common outcomes from the practice of peer observation at RTC.

THEME 2: Teaching Experiences - Challenges & Innovative practices

Keynote: Provocations and possibilities: Higher education for transformative agency?

Dr. Nick Hopwood

Associate Professor

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Nick Hopwood is co-convenor (with Kirsty Young) of the Life-wide Learning & Education Research Group @LLEResearch. He has more than a decade's experience researching how people learn in a range of settings, and he takes inspiration from the idea that with the right resources and support, the future that ought to be can be the future that actually comes to be. As a Professor of Professional Learning Nick often works on transdisciplinary projects collaborating with practitioners and researchers in health settings. His expertise pertains to the agency, professional learning, and positive change in families and schools. He has studied workplace learning, teacher learning that improves student outcomes, a partnership between health practitioners and families, inter-professional health practice, and health professional education. Nick also works with teachers and teacher educators to develop effective and inclusive pedagogies in Nepal and Bhutan. He teaches in the UTS Master of Education (Learning & Leadership) program, facilitating subjects in which professionals from education, health, corporate and other settings learn how to improve their own practice and effect positive change in their organization or wider profession through research. Nick also contributes to research training within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and across UTS, with a particular focus on innovative qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Medicine from Linköping University in 2019.

Theme 2 Papers:

Title: Perceptions of academics of the Royal University of Bhutan on the potential infusion of Educating for Gross National Happiness with Biggs' Constructive Alignment - Dr. Deki Gyamtso

Presenter: Dr. Deki C Gyamtso

Associate Professor, Paro College of Education

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Dr. Deki C Gyamtso, Ph.D., is a teacher educator. She started her career as a lecturer in Geography at Samtse College of Education and has since then had the privilege to hold numerous key positions, the current one being the associate professor for Paro College of Education. During her tenure, she contributed immensely to the overall academic development of Samtse College of Education, secondment for two years at The Royal Academy, Paro,

worked in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor, RUB, Managing Editor of the Bhutan Journal of Research and Development (BJRD), Higher Education Specialist, Researcher, Facilitator, and short-course designer. She wrote and evaluated several courses, taught undergraduate and postgraduate students, and trained school teachers and university academics.

Abstract

Few studies have explored teaching practices in Bhutan's tertiary sector. This research will investigate the perceptions of academics in the Royal University of Bhutan on the interface of Bhutanese and western Education epistemologies. In particular, it will explore the perceptions of academics of infusing the values and principles of Educating for Gross National Happiness (EdGNH) into the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) classroom practices using Biggs' Constructive Alignment (CA) model (Biggs, 1996). Based on the principles of infusing the two distinct approaches with the intention to enhance teacher quality and student learning, this study will explore perceptions of academics on setting out a 'middle path' in classroom practices and pedagogy in higher education. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study will address the following overarching question: How do academics in the Royal University of Bhutan perceive the infusion of Educating for Gross National Happiness with Biggs' Constructive Alignment in their classroom practices? A purposive sample of 20 academics in the Colleges of RUB will be selected for the research. Data will consist of interviews together with document analysis which will be used to develop the interview guide and to get a better understanding of academics' statements of classroom practices on a middle path approach of the infusion of Educating for GNH and Biggs' CA.

Exploring tutors' pedagogical content knowledge in higher education to understand challenges, needs, and opportunities in teaching-learning: A case study of RTC - Kencho Pelzom & Kuenga Norbu

About the presenter: Kuenga Norbu

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Kuenga Norbu graduated from Royal Thimphu College with a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and Sociology with a research focus on challenges in cultivation of rice and chilli in Bhutan. Currently, he is pursuing his Post Graduate degree in Public Administration. While at RTC, he participated in several research programs in areas such as youth unemployment, disability, teacher need assessment, role of non-state actors in Bhutanese education. He has also contributed to platforms such as the Druk Journal and was a regular contributor to the Political Science newsletter and the college library.

Abstract

The current study was conducted to understand the need, challenges, and opportunities in higher education at the Royal Thimphu College. Lee Shulman's concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) was used as the conceptual framework for the study. Four categories under PCK were identified; content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge to structure the questionnaire

design. The study employed a sequential explanatory mixed methodology, data was collected in two phases approach. Survey questionnaires were administered to all RTC faculty in phase one and focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted in the second phase. The results show that most faculty reported being comfortable with the content knowledge of the subject matters they teach, however, relating content to real-life experiences and providing context-specific examples was more difficult for novices. Prescriptive curriculum design was challenging for all faculty, this had negative relation to tutors' ability to be creative in teaching and assessment design. Almost all faculty reported using various mixed student-centred strategies for lesson and assessment however, only a handful of faculty members could articulate the use of learning theories in their lesson plan. Students' underdeveloped skill of independent learning was a major challenge in using student-centred learning design.

Title: Faculty Experience in Research in the Higher Education

Institute: College of Language and Culture Studies (CLCS) - Sangay Phuntsho (CLCS)

Presenter: Sangay Phuntsho

Lecturer, College of Language and Culture Studies

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Sangay Phuntsho works as a lecturer at the College of Language and Culture Studies, Royal University of Bhutan. He has Master's Degree in History from Lovely Professional University India and B.A. in History and Political Science from Sherubtse College. He has published several articles on tangible and intangible cultural heritages of Bhutan besides undertaking action research in the field of research methodology. At CLCS, he teaches basic research methods, history, GNH, Cultural Heritage, and political history to undergraduate students. Currently, he serves as the Programme Leader for BA in Bhutan and Himalayan Studies, and the Coordinator for Bhutan and Himalayan Research Centre (BHRC) at the College. His research interest is in writing about the oral history, culture, and political history of Bhutan.

Abstract

The Faculty Experience in Research in Higher Education has become indispensable over the years. The Royal University of Bhutan has urged its constituent college's faculty to generate knowledge and build confidence in doing research independently. As a part of teaching-learning, some faculty were already engaged in teaching research modules at the College. However, no research was done to see the impact of faculty's experience in research. This research not only find the faculty experience in research in higher education but also highlight what are the problems and solutions required to develop a research culture among the faculty. Research and knowledge creation is considered very important in higher education but is still new to the higher educational landscape in Bhutan. The Royal University of Bhutan has been investing funds to support faculty research, in fact in recent years the funds have tripled in value. However, the outcomes of the investment have not yet been systematically explored. This study aims to evaluate faculty experience doing research and teaching research at the higher educational level. It also plans to explore challenges and opportunities faculty face while doing research in higher education institutes. The study focuses on the faculty of CLCS. The study aims to employ qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups discussion

to understand faculty's experience. The study also explores faculty expectations and plans related to doing and teaching research. Additionally, it also looks at the kind of support faculty need from the institution to promote both individual learning and enhance institutional capacity for research. The findings are hoped to contribute to the discussion on research and teaching research in the undergraduate programmes within the RUB system.

Qualitative Research Training in a Bhutanese Context: Opportunities and Challenges - Brent Bianchi (RTC)

Presenter: Brent Bianchi

Librarian for South and Southeast Asian Studies

Yale University (From August 2022)

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Brent Bianchi arrived in Bhutan in February 2020. He served as Royal Thimphu College's Head Librarian, and also taught in the Anthropology Programme. Brent has an M.A. in South Asian Studies (University of Wisconsin) and a Master's in Library Science (University of North Carolina). He later also studied Ethnomusicology at the University of Washington. He gained his initial fieldwork experience in Nepal and Assam. Besides having worked at universities in his home country, the USA, and of course in Bhutan, he has also worked at universities in Cambodia, Thailand, China, and South Korea. From August 2022, he will be working at Yale University, as Librarian for South and Southeast Asian Studies. He served as a faculty advisor for *Jottings from the Field: Student Journal of the Anthropology Programme, Royal Thimphu College*. A piece which he guest edited, titled "Writing Ethnography (ETY201), Spring 2021: Bhutan Beneath the Surface", will appear in the forthcoming edition of the journal. He provides commentary on student projects using excerpts from nine students' writings, and explaining how they fit with the semester's overarching themes and with each other.

Abstract

After discussing the scope and rationale of the paper, I provide a chronological sketch of the opening portions of the ERASMUS-funded HAPPY training conducted during December 2021, which featured international and local experts guiding and facilitating the proceedings. This description helps to identify themes, and provides a clearer sense of how qualitative research methods were taught and learned. Next, drawing upon interviews, the paper considers the opportunities and challenges of qualitative research at HEIs in Bhutan. Interviews and other data suggest that participants found this training to be a challenging process, and felt a notable sense of accomplishment upon completing ToT3 in March 2022 (ToT3 being the phase which involved trainees doing research projects). Looking to areas that might be addressed in the future, I discuss my observation that usage convenience sampling by trainees during the ToT3 research was higher than I might have expected. Rather than automatically assuming this to be a 'weakness', however, I do my best to explore this topic from different angles. I also briefly touch upon the question of self-censorship in Bhutanese research. While I would describe my paper as 'suggestive' rather than 'conclusive', I hope that the ideas suggested here can be taken up further by future researchers and/or stimulate further debate.

Bhutanese Pre-Service Science Teachers' Conceptions of the Nature of Science: A View from Cross-Sectional Study - Sherab Jatsho and Karma Dorji

Presenter: Sherab Jatsho

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After pursuing his Bachelor's Degree in Physical Science from Sherubtse College, Sherab Jatsho completed his Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Physics) from Samtse College of Education, in 2014. Currently, he is a Program Officer with Quality Assurance and Accreditation Division, Department of Adult and Higher Education. Prior to joining the current position, he has served as a Physics Teacher for seven years with the Ministry of Education. He is a devoted student of science and a lifelong learner with a genuine passion in learning and researching. Sherab has numerous publications in national and international journals. His research interest includes Science Education, Higher Education, Technology in Education, Teacher and Student Wellbeing, and Educational Psychology.

Abstract

Science education and scientific literacy has gained enormous attention in the global educational scenario. In many cases, however, the holistic intent of science education is largely affected due to the lack of adequate understanding of the Nature of Science (NOS). This cross-sectional study was carried out to establish Bhutanese pre-service science teachers' conceptions of the NOS. One hundred and seven pre-service science teachers from one of the education colleges in Bhutan took part in the study based on convenient sampling design. The Myths of Science Questionnaire (MOSQ) adapted from Bauraphan (2009) was administered through online survey mode. The descriptive statistics in terms of frequency supported by written responses were employed to analyse the data. Findings showed that the Bhutanese pre-service science teachers do not possess matured and informed view of the NOS in many areas of scientific knowledge, scientific methods, scientists' practices, and scientific enterprise. Implications of the findings related to teacher preparation courses are discussed.

THEME 3: Higher Education Management and Quality Assurance

Keynote:

Professor Karanam Pushpanadham

Professor of Educational Management

Head (Off.), Department of Educational Administration

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda

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Karanam Pushpanadham is a Professor of Education at the Department of Educational Administration, Faculty of Education and Psychology, The M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat, India. He was a member of the Senate, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (2012-2013). Worked as a Dean of Students at the Faculty of Education and Psychology, the M.S. University of Baroda, Gujarat, India 2007-2010. Visiting Professor (2007-2008) at the Institute of International Education, Stockholm University, Sweden on Swedish Institutes Guest Scholarship for Advanced Research in Educational Leadership and Development focusing on the Head Teachers Management Training in Sweden. Worked as a Director, Education E-Learning Programmes and Assistant Dean for International Affairs at the Assumption International University of Thailand during 2005-2006. Guest Editor of an International Journal on Teaching and Studies, American Scholars Press, USA. Associated with the International Research Project on Education for Rural Transformation: India and China in collaboration. Directed International Training Programmes on School Leadership for the DEOs of Afghanistan and ICT in pedagogic development for the policy makers of Asia and African countries with the support of the Swedish International Development Agency.

Theme 3 Papers:

Continuous Quality Enhancement of Higher Education in Bhutan: A Post Accreditation Measure - Kinley Dorji, Kencho Pelzom, Sherab Jatsho, Nima Lham, and Tshering Pelden

Presenter: Nima Lham

Assistant Programme Officer

Quality Assurance and Accreditation Division

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Ms Nima Lham graduated from Royal Thimphu College affiliated to Royal University of Bhutan in 2016 with Bachelor of Arts in English and Environmental Studies. She did her PG in Public Administration from Royal Institute of Management and joined QAAD, DAHE in the year 2018 as an Assistant Programme Officer (APO). She facilitated institutional

accreditation of higher education institutions in the country, did reviews for guidelines for Recognition of Qualifications, guidelines for Education Consultancy and Placement Firms, institutional Accreditation Manual, and national Tertiary Education Policy (Draft). She also contributed to the development of National Programme Accreditation Standards and Processes, State of the Tertiary Education 2019, and State of the Tertiary Education 2020.

Abstract

Accreditation for higher education institutions in Bhutan began in 2016 with the establishment of the Bhutan Accreditation Council as mandated in the Tertiary Education Policy of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2010. The Council completed the first cycle of accreditation for 13 HEIs in 2019, but it is noted that there is limited study on quality assurance: process, challenges, and policies of the HEIs in Bhutan. There is rich international literature on the accreditation practices, strategies, policies and quality assurance comparison between public and private HEIs. However, there is limited study on post accreditation quality assurance processes even internationally. This study investigates the effect of the annual quality assurance process on the post accreditation quality improvement and enhancement in the accredited HEIs in Bhutan. To study this, a qualitative document analysis method was employed. One of the key findings was that adherence level did not provide insight into the quality of implemented recommendations. Furthermore, academic quality assurance was the most common initiative and recommendation implemented amongst HEIs. It was found that the most common challenge was in determining the effort of HEIs to implement the recommendations which were beyond their capacity. Finally, there was a need to review the current template and format of reporting of the AQAR and related documents. Based on the findings, recommendations were made to enhance the current IQA reporting and progress for post accreditation quality sustenance.

Performance of Higher Education Institutions in Bhutan: An exploratory study of the Institutional Self-Assessment Report (ISAR) and Accreditors' Report (AR) - Sangay Choden (DAHE), Kezang Sherab (PCE), Dolma Choden Roder (RTC), Nar Bdr Raika (DAHE), Sonam Dendup (MoE), Norbu Wangdi (MoE), Sushma Pradhan (MoE), and Sonam (MoE)

Presenter: Sangye Choden

Chief Programme Officer

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Sangye Choden has a Master's Degree in Commerce (Economics and Finance) from Curtin University, Perth, Australia. She graduated from Sherubtse College with a Bachelor's Degree in Commerce in the year 2000. She started her career in the Ministry of Finance and worked there for 12 years. In 2012, upon the establishment of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Division (QAAD) under the Department of Adult and Higher Education (DAHE), she joined the division. Currently, she is serving as the Chief Programme Officer for the division. As the Secretariat to the Bhutan Accreditation Council (BAC), the division has completed carrying

out 1st cycle accreditation for all the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the country. As the head of the division, she led accreditation exercises in most of the colleges. She was also involved as one of the Core Working Group members for the Bhutan Education Blueprint, 2014. Similarly, she also played a crucial role in the development of the following documents; Accreditation Principles, Institutional Accreditation Manual, Bhutan Qualifications Framework, National Programme Accreditation Standards and Processes, Guidelines for Recognition of Qualifications, Guidelines for Education Consultancy and Placement Firms (ECPFs).

Abstract

Given that quality assurance in higher education (HE) is of utmost importance, the Bhutan Accreditation Council initiated mandatory institutional accreditation in 2016 and completed the first cycle for 13 eligible higher education institutions (HEIs) in 2020. This stand-alone qualitative documentary analysis of the accreditation reports of the 13 HEIs (Institutional Self-Assessment Reports and Accreditors' Reports) was carried out to provide insights into the overall quality of HE and the accreditation process in Bhutan. A total of some 2182 pages of texts were analysed using a three-stage coding process (Open coding, Axial coding and Selective coding). Findings suggest that the Bhutanese HE sector, given its short history, has progressed a lot with rigorous curriculum processes in place, enhancement in the research and publication culture, infrastructure development, student services and overall quality assurance mechanism. However, this report calls for more focused attention of the HEIs and other relevant stakeholders to create an even more robust quality assurance culture and accountability system to be at par with international standards.

Rethinking higher education landscape in Bhutan post-COVID-19 - Kinley Rinchen

Presenter: Kinley Rinchen

Chief Planning Officer

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Kinley Rinchen has a Bachelor's Degree in Geography (Hons) from Sherubtse College (Delhi University). After having been selected through the Civil Service Selection Examinations in 2002, he had undergone one year of Postgraduate Certificate in Development Management at the Royal Institute of Management in 2003 and joined the Royal University of Bhutan in January 2004. Since then Kinley Rinchen has served the University and participated in major initiatives related to the planning and formulation of policies on higher education and the transformation of the University. Later in 2008-2009, he pursued Postgraduate Diploma in Public Administration and Master of Public Policy at the Australian National University, Australia. Kinley Rinchen is an International Visitors Leadership Program recipient specializing in higher education and a Hubert Humphrey Fellow in 2017-18 with specialization in higher education administration and leadership pursued at Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania, USA. In addition, Kinley is deeply interested in scholarly works. He has papers published and presented at conferences centred on public policy, education, and management. His works *Education Reforms in Bhutan: Meeting the Youth Employment*

Challenge won an international award and *Education for Employment: The Challenges to Tertiary Education in the 21st Century* won a national award. His recent publications include ICT education in Bhutan's tertiary institution and Higher education: A case study of leadership at the Royal University of Bhutan. Kinley Rinchen is currently completing a book on a compilation of local beliefs in pursuit of his passion for research and writing.

Abstract

Great initiatives have long begun to offer opportunities for lifelong learning. It is one of the pillars of a knowledge-based society. The establishment of open universities, creation of world campuses, development of various learning management systems, offering online credited courses, and rapid surge in MOOCs are a few of those initiatives. However, there has been not much support for similar initiatives in Bhutan. Laws and rules were framed to discourage people from studying through alternative modes of learning. With the emphasis being centered on just face-to-face learning, higher education institutions are continuously grappling with limited resources to develop academic buildings, expand halls and auditoria, and increase the number of staff with the expansion of the student base.

However, with the onset of COVID-19, the higher education system has been offered the opportunity to do things differently. With lockdowns imposed by the government, all the colleges and institutions sent their students home and classes were conducted remotely. Lecturers, who were earlier uncomfortable using the virtual learning environment (VLE), had picked up the knowledge and skills overnight and delivered their classes online.

These new experiences offered an opportunity to rethink the overall higher education landscape. A more agile and EdTech-based infrastructure supported by favourable policies and ecosystems has become timely. This paper discusses in detail how such a new ecosystem could be built to make higher education more responsive to the emerging needs and contribute more effectively towards building Bhutan into a knowledge-based society. It also discusses some key possible challenges for the higher education institutions to better prepare for the new and emerging development.

Theme 4: Inclusiveness in Higher Education – Learning difficulties and disabilities

Papers:

Preparedness of Bhutanese Higher Education Institutions for Inclusive Education: An Exploratory Study - Ganeshman Gurung, Ramesh Kumar Chhetri, Sangay Tashering & Kesang Wangmo

Presenters:

Kesang Wangmo

Lecturer

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Ms Kesang Wangmo worked as a school teacher for thirteen years before joining as a teacher educator at Paro college of Education (PCE) in 2010. She has a Master degree in TESOL with LD as one of the SEN components. She also has experience working with children with special needs at Changangkha MSS school. Currently, she works as a Lecturer at Samtse College of Education (SCE), Royal University of Bhutan. She teaches English, Inclusive Education, and Professionals modules.

Ganeshman Gurung

Lecturer

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Ganeshman Gurung has 22 years of enriching experiences in teaching. He started his career as a school teacher and then later joined Samtse College of Education, the Royal University of Bhutan in 2007. He currently works as a Programme Leader for the Bachelor of Arts in Social Work. He obtained his Master of Science (MSc) from Madras University, Chennai, followed by PhD from Andhra University, Andhra Pradesh, India. He has designed and offered a number of courses and professional development programmes for Diploma, Bachelor, Postgraduate and Higher Education programmes. He is an active researcher and has implemented a number of research projects.

Abstract

This study explored the preparedness of the higher education institutions in Bhutan for the inclusion of students with disabilities. The study employed a mixed-methods design and included 867 survey and 98 interview participants consisting of academics, non-teaching staff, and students of the Colleges under the Royal University of Bhutan and employees from other relevant agencies outside the Royal University of Bhutan. Results suggested that although inclusive education resonates across most policy documents, the gap between policies and

practice in higher education institutions in Bhutan remains a reality. The higher education institutions in Bhutan are not adequately prepared for the inclusion of students with special needs. The study recommends that higher education institutions develop specific policies that provide provision for inclusion of students with special needs which will in turn guide higher education institutions in developing inclusive infrastructures and facilities, academic programmes, and other support services.

RTC - ESRC-GCRF Project: Understanding, Developing, and Supporting Meaningful Work for Youth with Disabilities in Bhutan: Networks, Communities, and Transitions - Sonam Ura

Presenter: Sonam Ura

Grants Co-ordinator/ ESRC-GRCF Project Coordinator

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Mr. (Ura) Sonam Tshewang is Grants Coordinator and Research Project Coordinator at Royal Thimphu College. He began his career as a school teacher and, later, vice principal at various institutions across Bhutan. He joined Universal Learn Today as a Research Associate in 2013 and subsequently became a core member of the Royal Academy Bhutan. Sonam holds an MSc in Education (Comparative International Education) from Oxford University. Sonam seeks to actualise the potential of every individual and actively engaged in and contributed to programmes that facilitate the development of new ideas and designs in various projects. He is also a keen social worker actively rendering services to the Ura community and his locality.

Abstract

The youths of disabilities are often challenged with accessibility and opportunities to higher education. Yet access to education for persons with disabilities require additional needs. These needs are complex issues that go along several aspects, including: severity of disability, geography, availability and accessibility of college programmes, social networks, and social norms, among others. For Bhutan, we are still constrained by resources including teaching learning materials and approaches. So, what are the scopes to further and better the opportunities for persons with disabilities in higher education? What needs to be done for better inclusion?

Theme 5: Technology and Higher Education

Keynote: *Convergence of AI and Blockchain Technology*

Dr. Audrey Low

President

Gyalpozhing College of Information Technology

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Audrey Low is a serial educator from Singapore and has spent more than a decade in teaching and researching in the areas of emerging technologies. She is extremely passionate about Web 3 technologies, Quantum analytics and enjoys dabbling in epistemic conversations about Algorithms and the economics of Technopreneurship. Prior to teaching, she spent a stint in Banking and Oil & Gas where she specialised in leading the organisation's CRM and Marketing architecture. She is currently the President of GCIT (Gyalphozhing College of Information Technology), Bhutan. Her greatest motivation are students and firmly believes that success is the sum of small efforts, repeated.

Theme 5 Papers:

Competencies of RUB academics in using virtual learning environment features for students' engagement in online learning - Ugyen Pem, Sangay Tshering, Chenga Dorji & Dr. Rinchen Dorji

Presenter: Ugyen Pem

Assistant Professor, Department of STEM Education

Samtse College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan.

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Ugyen Pem has a M.Sc (Physics) from the University of Roorkee, India and a GCES from the University of New England, Australia. She is leading the M.Ed in Physics programme at the Samtse College of Education. Currently, she teaches Physics of Contemporary Issues, Physics Education, and Advanced Studies III. Furthermore, as an IAU NOC, she promotes astronomy outreach activities in the college and schools. Her research interests include place-based education, virtual laboratory skills, astronomy, and physics.

Abstract: This study investigated the competency of academics from eight constituent colleges under Royal University Bhutan in using virtual learning environment (VLE) features to engage the students in online learning. A parallel convergent mixed methods design was adopted for this study. A total of 152 academics and 647 students participated in online survey questionnaires, along with 20 academics and 36 students who responded to the online open-ended interview questionnaires. In addition, auto-generated reports of VLE usage of 93 modules across the colleges were analyzed to validate the findings on the usage of VLE features by academics. The quantitative data analysis shows that the mean and standard

deviation of the composite items by academics were higher than those of the students. Similar findings also resulted from the qualitative data analysis, which showed that the majority of the academics' overall experience of using VLE for online teaching was positive, whereas the majority of the students' overall experience was challenging because of a lack of facilities, erratic power supply, and low internet speed. The document analysis of the auto-generated reports indicated that the majority of the academics were found to be competent in using only basic VLE features and lacked competency in designing interactive online lessons for students' engagement. Therefore, both the academics and the students found that they needed to upgrade their skills and knowledge of using advanced VLE features, enhance IT skills, and provide adequate resources and technical support for effective engagement of the students in online learning. The study also provided some key recommendations to improve the online teaching culture in the colleges of RUB.

Degree of Learner Autonomy Among University Students - Chimi Dema & Kezang Yuden

Presenter: Chimi Dema

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Chimi Dema (corresponding author) is an Associate Lecturer at Gyalpozhing College of Information Technology (GCIT). She completed her Master's degree in Teaching English as an International Language at Prince of Songkla University, Thailand. She has published two papers in peer-reviewed journals. Her research interest lies in the area of Conversation Analysis (CA), the development of learners' English conversation skills, and learner autonomy. She was awarded the 2021 Outstanding Dissertation and Thesis Award by Graduate School, Prince of Songkla University

Abstract: This one-group pretest-posttest quasi-experimental study aimed to examine the degree of learner autonomy among first-year students of Gyalpozhing College of Information Technology (GCIT) who were taught using the 'Learning by Doing' approach. A total of 62 first-year students taking BSc in Information Technology in the first semester of the academic year 2021 participated in the study. Participants completed pre-and post-closed-ended questionnaires at the beginning and end of the course and a semi-structured interview at the end of the semester. The quantitative data obtained from the closed-ended questionnaire was analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics and qualitative data using content analysis. The findings from the study shed light on students' level of learner autonomy and their readiness to embrace self-directed or independent learning approaches such as 'Learning by Doing'. The study also unveiled benefits and challenges faced by students whilst studying under the 'Learning by Doing' pedagogy which will eventually help in addressing the issues and enable students to be responsible for their own learning. Overall, the results from this research revealed that learners can enhance their learner autonomy with proper training and pedagogical tools in place.

Opportunities and Challenges of Online Teaching: A Convergent Mixed-Method Study on the Implementation of Online Teaching in the Colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan -Kinley Seden, Rinchen Dorji, Lhapchu, and Thinley Wangchuk

Presenters:

Lhapchu

PGCHE Programme Leader

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Lhapchu is a lecturer in Chemistry with the Department of STEM Education, Samtse College of Education. He has a Master's in Education (MEd) from ECU, Australia, Graduate Certificate in Education Studies from UNE, Australia, and Bachelor of Education (BEd Secondary) from NIE, Samtse, Bhutan. His research interest areas include secondary and higher education, learning and teaching, and STEM education.

Kinley Seden

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Kinley Seden, PhD is a lecturer at the Department of Social Science, Samtse College of Education. Her research interests include psychology of teaching learning and assessment practices, gender and education, teacher education, and professional development.

Abstract

The study addresses the transition to teach a curriculum designed for face-to-face teaching through a full mode online teaching. There has been infusion of online technologies in teaching contexts, and teaching practices globally, little attention has been given to online teaching and learning in Bhutanese higher education context. This study investigated the opportunities and challenges of online teaching in RUB colleges using a convergent mixed method approach. To gather data, survey questionnaire and interviews were used. 153 faculties and 1206 students responded to the survey. 30 faculties and 30 students consisting of equal number of male and female were interviewed. Descriptive analysis and inferential statistics were conducted for survey data. Similarly, interviews and open-ended responses were read, analysed, and interpreted for themes. The quantitative finding reveals age, experiences, educational qualification and colleges as important predictors of efficacy in the online teaching learning and assessment practices. Further, a positive correlation between lecturers' online knowledge and skills to online assessment, learning support and resources was noted while students' accessibility to online learning platforms and materials had lower correlation with other items. The qualitative finding indicates similar benefits and challenges related to online teaching. The finding also reveals a need for lecturers to build their online knowledge and skills for effective teaching.

Exploring university students' acceptance of e-learning using E-learning Acceptance Measure (ELAM) in Bhutan: A validation study - Sonam Dendup, MoE

Presenter:

Sonam Dhendup

Senior Teacher

Yangchen Gatschel MSS

Ministry of Education

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Sonam Dhendup completed his MA from the University of Canberra, Australia in 2013. Currently, he is a senior teacher at the ministry of education, Bhutan. He is a passionate emerging teacher-researcher with a research interest in quantitative (Multivariate analysis) and has several papers in peer-reviewed international journals. Besides, several papers are under review in reputed journals. His research interest areas are educational technologies; higher and teacher education; digital learning systems; school improvement, and Teaching English to speakers of other languages.

Abstract

This study presents two studies. The first part of this study (n=230) involved validation of the E-Learning Acceptance Model (ELAM) proposed by Teo (2010) for its applicability in the context of the study, using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). This was followed by an investigation of the Bhutanese students' (n=206) acceptance level of the e-learning system. A total of 436 students from five colleges under the Royal University of Bhutan participated in this study. While the findings of the first run of CFA revealed that the model was a bad fit for the present participants, modification indices disclosed that a better fit would be obtained if some items were correlated and removed. In doing this, the present findings supported only 17 of 21 items from the ELAM model. As for the second section of the study, the findings showed that the present participants held an above-average acceptance level of the e-learning system used in the context. This study concludes with theoretical implications and recommendations for future research.

Panel Discussion

21st Century Bhutanese Graduates

Tashi Namgyal, Director, Department
of Adult and Higher Education, MoE



Aum Tashi Pem, Director General,
Royal Civil Service Commission



Dasho Nidup Dorji, Vice-Chancellor,
Royal University of Bhutan



Chencho Lhamu, Executive Director
Bhutan Centre for Media and
Democracy



Sonam Pelden Thaye, Director,
Royal Institute of Management



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